



For Immediate Release
September 7, 2005

Contact: Lori Aragon
Amber Owens
502-564-4460

State Employees Address Merit Task Force Committee

Task force members respond to resignation of Attorney General from Panel

FRANKFORT, Ky. --A panel of seven state merit employees spoke before members of the Merit System Blue Ribbon Task Force today.

They had the opportunity to speak candidly to task force members. Merit employee Pat Bryant said to the task force, "I never feared for my job because of the merit system...I felt secure with the merit system that I could do my job and do it freely."

Ronnie O'Nan, a staff assistant in the Transportation Cabinet's Office of Fiscal Management and a representative of the Kentucky Transportation Employees' Association said, "I've seen the merit system work for us."

O'Nan described how those with hiring authority usually look at merit employees first when a position becomes open, preferring to promote someone within state government rather than look outside the system.

Several task force members referred to those hiring practices as "pre-selection."

Secretary LeJuana Wilcher said preferring state hires exclusively can lead to thwarting the Commonwealth's efforts to promote affirmative action.

“The key to improving our representation (of minorities and women) is to cast a wide net,” she said, adding that “policy seems impossible with the current internal mobility system that is present.”

Likewise, Personnel Secretary Erwin Roberts, president of the Blue Ribbon Task Force, said there are many qualified women and minorities currently unemployed who are seeking state positions.

“I think we can miss out on opportunities to hire women and minorities when you put preference on internal mobility candidates,” said Roberts.

Several task force members today also commented on Attorney General Greg Stumbo’s resignation from the task force. Stumbo resigned last week, claiming, among other things, that the Merit Task Force is attempting to eliminate internal mobility.

Secretary Roberts said Stumbo’s resignation letter was “filled with a lot of factual inaccuracies. It’s an attempt to raise undo fear among employees. I’m concerned about that.”

Merit task force member Jack Smith Jr. read a four-page response to Stumbo’s resignation letter.

“Mr. Stumbo attacks me personally using innuendo and half-truths to help justify his resignation,” Smith said. “If Mr. Stumbo feels he is incapable of making a positive contribution to the efforts of this Task Force that is clearly his decision to make. But, is attacking my character, integrity and professionalism really necessary to communicate his resignation?”

The next full task force meeting is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Sept. 14th in room 149 of the Capitol Annex. The sub-committees are scheduled to present their recommendations at that time.

Those who would like to view today’s task force meeting can do so online at www.ket.org and click on the “Merit System Task Force” link. Video of the meeting will remain available in KET’s Web archives.

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